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Comparative Communism's Fall The First Phase: The 'Intelligentsia Revolution' of 1989-1990

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The Soviet Union held the first contested elections in its postwar history—still within the framework of the one-party system—in spring 1989. That same summer, the ruling Polish United Workers' Party underwent a dramatic electoral defeat by *Solidarnosc*, then just beginning to organize as a political party. Waves of mass demonstrations, primarily led by the intelligentsia, shook the Soviet bloc the following fall and winter. The Berlin Wall was opened. By late spring 1990, popular vote had sanctioned radical change in the political landscape of key Eastern European countries, with onetime ruling communist parties becoming minority groups in their parliaments. During this period the Communist Party of the Soviet Union relinquished its 'leading role,' and a splinter group of radical intellectuals, deputies, and dissenting communist officials began organizing as a legal opposition party. In little more than a year the transition away from the political system and institutions of the communist *ancien régime* has reached what may be the point of no return.

Western analysts are also entering a transitional phase as events rapidly erode the subdiscipline used for the comparative study of communist regimes. However, until *comparative communism* disappears from the political science lexicon, we can still use its frame of reference to analyze the *fall* of those regimes. "Comparative Communism's Fall" may be subtitled to indicate the crumbling of such pillars of communism as the centrally planned economy, Marxist-Leninist ideology and political culture, and, above all, the one-party system. The above subtitle 'Intelligentsia revolution of 1989-1990' refers to the phase when new political parties in the Soviet Union and East Europe were still embryonic. This article will therefore focus on individuals rather than structures; in particular, on the sociopolitical profile of those who emerged from a democra-

tized political arena to confront the professional politicians of the communist party-state machines.

I contend that the formation of political elites and sub-elites of popular (particularly working class) background has been an important source of ideological legitimation for communist regimes. It has been instrumental in their long-successful attempt to ensure social integration and political stability, which allowed the nonelective, nondemocratic nature of the selection process to be deemed irrelevant. The high, ever-increasing specified quota of ordinary working people and active blue-collar workers in national legislatures and local councils, and the large number of former workers among full-time party and government officials, distinguished communist political institutions from their 'bourgeois' counterparts in the West. Thus, a visible, physical link was established between the ideological formula of the 'leading role of the working class' and the political formula of the 'leading role of the communist party.' Today, these formulae together have come under fire.

The central principle of the "political reform" initiated in the Soviet Union that spread throughout East Europe was the introduction of contested elections, i.e., democratization of the representative system and the process of selecting political elites. Initially, abolition of the one-party system was not contemplated. However, the reform process brought to the center of the political arena a stratum long relegated to political minority, passive acquiescence, or illegal dissent: the intelligentsia. Whatever their organizational affiliation and ideological outlook, these individuals represent a radical social, cultural, and political alternative to the *ex-plebes* who heretofore have run the communist party-states. Their chief objective has turned out to be to advance the process of democratization from individual election contest to multiparty competition and



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political representation, and thus undercut communist one-party rule. This has prompted a Hungarian sociologist to depict the entire political process as an "intelligentsia revolution."¹ Konrád and Szelényi's famous prediction that "the intellectuals" would gain power within communist regimes thus has proved only half-true: the process is taking place, but outside and against those regimes.²

What follows is an attempt to analyze the intelligentsia revolution of 1989–1990 as the first phase in the process of the fall of communism. Although my main focus is on the Soviet Union, developments in four countries of East Central Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and East Germany) will be used as comparative background.

Communist Workers as Professional Politicians³

To what extent has the social origin of communist political elites left its imprint on the policy environment of communist regimes? In the socioeconomic sphere, a list might include the complete rejection of free market dynamics, full employment policies, fixed low prices for primary goods, free social services, and a tendency to social and economic leveling in which unskilled manual labor is more prized than technical and professional capability. In the cultural sphere: the imposition of the proletarian, industrialist and 'laborist' stereotypes of socialist realism in art and literature, and of the orthodox Marxist-Leninist 'class approach' in various fields, from social sciences to international relations. Not all these measures were necessary outcomes of a socialist revolution. In fact, they were worked out after new generations of "proletarians" replaced the "intellectuals" who often comprised the revolutions' original leadership nucleus.

But the clearest imprint is to be found in the system of representation and political recruitment based on preimposed social quotas rather than contested elections and strongly influenced by pro-worker and anti-intelligentsia biases. This has allowed communist elites of working-class origin to grant privileged access to political careers to people sociologically similar to themselves.

In the Soviet Union during the past two decades, the workers' quota among the deputies to the Supreme Soviet rose from 26.6 to 35.2 percent. The quota allotted to workers (by occupation, not just social origin) among the almost two-and-a-half million Soviet local deputies went from 28.8 percent in 1965 to

44.5 percent in 1985; that of the "representatives of the intelligentsia," or nonmanual, "white-collar" employees, declined from 38 to 30.7 percent.⁴ The soviets' secondary role in actual interest representation and decision-making does not invalidate the importance of these data, for active membership in a local soviet is often an initial step in a political career. Moreover, an analogous social trend characterized recruitment to the political system's main institution, the Communist Party. To the increasing number of active workers recruited as ordinary members, one must here add former workers promoted to professional political roles who moved up through the hierarchy and were appointed to positions of leadership in the party and other state and public organizations. In 1976 Brezhnev registered with pride: "The workers' stratum in the ranks of the party has been growing steadily and the number of representatives of the working class in the soviets and in our public organizations has been increasing."⁵ Bohdan Harasymiw has found that political recruitment under Brezhnev followed a "proletarianizing" policy,⁶ while "an important social element [the intelligentsia] was being blocked from 'circulating' in the Soviet political elite."⁷ According to Seweryn Bialer, the children of the Soviet intelligentsia were systematically discouraged from entering political careers, and the dominant working-class origin of Soviet elites and sub-elites constituted an important source of political stability, for it "confirmed the claim that Soviet authority is derived from the people."⁷

Similar policies were implemented in East Europe, with some variations. In the 1970s, East Germany had the highest percentage of industrial workers among party members (57 percent), Hungary the lowest (less than 40 percent). Anti-intelligentsia and pro-worker biases emerged with particular vigor during political crises. Recruitment of active workers into the Hungarian party increased substantially, after 1956, together with massive promotion of former workers to administrative and party posts. In Czechoslovakia, an extensive purge was launched against the intelligentsia after the events of 1968–69, and workers made up 63 percent of the new members admitted to the Communist Party between 1971 and 1976. In Poland, the mass strikes of 1970–1971 which led to Gomulka's fall played to the advantage of a counter-elite of young *apparatchiki*, most of proletarian or peasant background, who were eager to demote the old elite, better educated and predominantly middle-class.⁸ In 1971, the newly elected Secretary of the Polish United Workers Party, Edward Gierek, successfully used the argument of his working class origin in persuading the workers of Szczecin to trust 'their own government' and resume work. He also promised to speed up "the process of

1 See the interview with the Hungarian sociologist Erzsebet Szallai in *Manifesto*, 22 March 1990.

2 György Konrád and Ivan Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

3 This section, and indeed the whole theoretical framework of this article, owes much to the pioneering works of Rita di Leo. See in particular her "Soviet Workers as Professional Politicians" in *Laboratorio Politico*, 1:3, 1981.

4 See *Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR* (Moscow: Izvestiya, 1966 and 1984); and *Itogi vyborov i sostav narodnykh deputatov mestnykh sovetov* (Moscow: Izvestiya, 1965 and 1985).

5 See Brezhnev's speech at the XXIV CPSU Congress in XXIV s'ezd KPSS. *Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1976), I, p. 89.

6 Bohdan Harasymiw, *Political Elite Recruitment in the Soviet Union* (London: Macmillan, 1985) pp. 188, 192.

7 Seweryn Bialer, *The Stalin Successors. Leadership, Stability and Change in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 181, 180.

8 See Baruch A. Hazan, *The East European Political System. Instruments of Power* (London: Westview, 1985), chapter 4; and the essays by Miklos Molnar, Peter A. Toma, M.K. Dziwanowski, and Manfred Grote in Stephen Fisher-Galati, ed., *The Communist Parties of Eastern Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

integration of the working class in the management of the state.”⁹ Ten years later, when new waves of mass strikes caused Gierek’s own fall, the French political scientist Maurice Duverger spoke of a symbiotic relationship between the working class and the communist ruling elites, whereby workers’ upheavals in communist regimes perform a role “more or less equivalent to a vote of non-confidence in parliamentary regimes.”¹⁰

In sum, Harasymiw’s observation that the Soviet ‘proletarianizing’ policy of political elite recruitment pays “more attention to revolts of workers than to those of intellectuals” may be extended to East Europe as a whole. Equally valid for all communist regimes of the Soviet type is Bialer’s observation, that “the symbolic cult of the working classes creates a propitious environment which supports the aspirations of working-class individuals to enter the elite and propitious conditions for their competition with individuals of other social origins.”¹¹

This came to be challenged by the “intelligentsia revolution” of 1989–1990.

East Europe: Driving Westward

The new individuals who took over leading governmental positions in East Europe in 1989–1990 are socially and politically opposite to the old professional politicians of the communist party machines. Most were ‘pure intellectuals’ whose primary occupations and interests have been in literature, art, scientific research, and academic teaching. Many had little political experience (and often no aptitude) apart from such “cryptopolitical” activities as the Czechoslovak intelligentsia’s denunciation of human rights violations, or the consulting role performed by some Polish Catholic intellectuals within Solidarnosc. All were brought into the political arena by an heterogeneous alliance of ‘progressive forces’ (social movements, civic associations, intellectual clubs) which could hardly be considered proper political parties.

The obvious example is Czechoslovakia, where the strong ‘anti-politics’ attitude that had consolidated in the course of two decades was reflected in the strategy of ethical rather than political opposition elaborated by Václav Havel and other prominent intellectuals of Charter 77. It was they who “improvised” Civic Forum, the coalition that in December 1989 brought Havel to the presidency and forced the communists into the minority in a “government of national understanding.” Similarly, before West Germany’s parties won East Germany’s general elections in the spring of 1990, the opposition was organized primarily by civic associations (New Forum being the largest) uniting prominent writers, artists, scientists, academics, professionals, and human rights activists. The team of East

German opposition leaders who entered Hans Modrow’s coalition cabinet in February 1990 as ministers without portfolio was composed of such individuals. In Hungary too the leading opposition forces, Democratic Forum and the Alliance of Free Democrats, had a similar social composition. After winning the majority of votes in March 1990 elections, these forces reached an agreement in the parliament whereby the dissident writer Arpad Goncz was elected president of the Hungarian republic. Even in Poland, where the opposition was rooted in a mass trade union with a long militant experience in key industrial plants, no working-class political leadership emerged to handle the electoral victory of summer 1989, for which Solidarnosc, admittedly, was unprepared. Two intellectuals and former advisers of Walesa’s 1980 strike committee soon took over the main political positions. Medieval historian Bronislaw Geremek headed the Solidarnosc deputies’ group in parliament, while journalist Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who for seventeen years had been deputy chairman of the Catholic Intelligentsia Club in Warsaw, became the first noncommunist premier in the East bloc. Mazowiecki’s cabinet was a politically heterogeneous but socially homogeneous mélange of long-active dissident intellectuals and young economists and professionals who had not yet engaged in public activity.¹²

It is emblematic of the intelligentsia revolution that different political contexts produced cabinets and parliaments with similar social composition. Perhaps even more revealing is the comparison between Havel’s and Mazowiecki’s sociopolitical profile and that of Alexander Dubcek and Lech Walesa, who also aspired to top political positions in their countries.

Just five months before he was elected President, Havel admitted that he had no political program and considered politics a secondary concern: “I am a writer and that is my first vocation, all my life I have been doing nothing else but writing and I have been speaking my mind.”¹³ But the opposition preferred him to even such a world-wide symbol as Dubcek, the father of the 1968 Prague Spring. Dubcek had a black mark in his past: he had been a professional communist politician, albeit a reformist. Mazowiecki himself evinced more interest in the social than the political side of Solidarnosc’s work. But he was deemed a more suitable candidate for premiership than Walesa—a prestigious figure at home and abroad, but, after all, a worker.

Havel and Mazowiecki apparently represented a more radical symbolic rupture with the traditional type of political leader that constituted the primary target of the intelligentsia revolution than did Dubcek and Walesa. Havel, after persuading Dubcek to renounce the presidency for the lower-profile chairmanship of the parliament, hinted at this when he told an interviewer that “in the contemporary world it is the intellectuals rather than the politicians who must bear upon themselves

9 For Gierek’s speech in Szczecin see E. Wacowska, ed., *Rewolta szczeciński i jej znaczenie* (Paris: Kultura, 1971).

10 *Le Monde*, 26 August 1980.

11 See Harasymiw, op.cit., p. 192; and Bialer, op.cit., p. 180.

12 For the general background of recent developments in Eastern Europe see the “Eastern Europe in 1989” issue of *Radio Free Europe*, 1:1, January 1990. Deeper insight on individual countries can be derived from William H. Luers, “Czechoslovakia: Road to Revolution”, *Foreign Affairs*, 69:2, Spring 1990; Nigel Swain, “Hungary’s Socialist Project in Crisis”, *New Left Review*, no. 176, July–August 1989; Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Nascent Civil Society in the German Democratic Republic”, *Problems of Communism*, 38:2–3, March–June 1989.

13 See *Radio Free Europe Research*, 14:11, August 1989, p. 13.

the responsibility of government, just as it was in the ancient world.”¹⁴ And Walesa, who in 1989 had supported Mazowiecki's nomination as premier, in April 1990 attacked the “intellectuals” who lead the Solidarnosc political caucus, Civic Committee, for declining to nominate him as president on the grounds that a worker would not know “how to speak, dress and behave” in that position.¹⁵ The Solidarnosc leadership split shortly thereafter into two factions: westernizer intellectuals and Catholic populists.

Interestingly enough, Walesa's populist reaction echoes the traditional tones of communist pro-worker and anti-intelligentsia rhetoric. Six months earlier, for instance, the Czechoslovak Communist Party weekly *Tribuna* had warned with similar emphasis that “intellectualist trends” in Soviet perestroika could lead “to some kind of elitist, intellectualist and petty-bourgeois system.”¹⁶ It should come as no surprise that it was the communists who first understood the political implications of the new situation.

Those who were opposed, like Egon Krenz and his cohorts in East Germany, reacted in the old-fashioned way, visiting factories and plants and trying to revitalize the party and trade union contacts with the workers, as if their major concern were to prevent a worker upheaval and the implied “vote of non-confidence.”¹⁷ Those who sensed better whence the challenge came attempted to avoid disaster by eliminating the preference for workers in political recruitment and trying to enlist other social strata. “In the present situation,” the Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Milos Jakes said in October 1989, it is essential “to admit to the Party [new members] regardless of the kind of social stratum they belong to.”¹⁸ But the October 1989 Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP), guided by the reformist majority of Imre Pozsgay and Reszö Nyers, made the direction of the process even clearer. It practically disbanded the Party, with its leading political role, social composition, and “old-fashioned” symbols. “Workers” was dropped from the Party's name, the motto “Proletarians of the World—Unite!” from the front page of the Party daily. The HSWP's successor, the Socialist Party of Hungary, has no preference for workers in political recruitment and no pretense of political monopoly. As former First Secretary Károly Grosz and other communist loyalists observed bitterly, these decisions were made by a congress whose social composition did not reflect that of the party that was being dissolved. In 1985, 40 percent of the HSWP members were workers, 20 percent peasants; only 7 percent of the congress delegates in 1989 were workers, while 90 percent were “intellectuals.”¹⁹

Similar measures taken subsequently in East Germany and Poland were belated attempts to incorporate the intelligentsia and absorb its demands into a framework of *reform*, however radical. This might have been possible in Czechoslovakia in 1968, but in 1989 the intelligentsia was driving the nascent East European civil societies toward *revolution*. This demanded far deeper changes in both personnel and rules, and the establishment of a classical Western model of multiparty electoral competition and political representation.

Soviet Union: Standing at the Crossroads

In the Soviet Union the transition process has been less linear than in East Europe and its outcome is still undecided. The Soviet Communist Party has not yet lost control of the national legislature, and Soviet radical intellectuals today lead the opposition rather than the government. The Congress of People's Deputies elected last spring—almost 90 percent of its deputies CPSU members, its president the General Secretary of the CPSU—may appear an anachronism against some of today's East European parliaments. This should not overshadow the fact that the trend of social renewal of political institutions was actually initiated in the Soviet Union; that there, too, it is leading to political self-organization of the radical intelligentsia and to electoral confrontation with the Communist Party. But in the USSR the impact on the structure of political power has been more gradual, though no less dramatic in the long run. The trend began with 1987 local elections and was consolidated in the general elections of 1989 and the local and republican elections of 1990, and its gradual nature allowed broader discussion of its political implications and more articulated public confrontation than in East Europe.

Three Soviet Elections

In June 1987, a few months after Mikhail Gorbachev announced his program of electoral reform, a local “experiment” with multicandidate competition was carried out in one percent of the country's constituencies. More white-collars and fewer blue-collars were elected than in the past, while some local party bosses and government officials failed to win election. More interestingly, even in the overwhelming majority of constituencies where single-candidate elections remained under firm Party control, an inversion of the ‘proletarianizing’ trend apparently was allowed, for the first time in

¹⁴ See the interview with Václav Havel in *Repubblica*, 6 February, 1990.

¹⁵ See *BBC—Summary of World Broadcasts*, Part 2, Eastern Europe, 23 April, 1990, C1, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Tribuna*, no. 35, 1989, quoted in *Radio Free Europe Research*, 14:40, October 1989, p. 8.

¹⁷ See *Radio Free Europe Research*, 14:43, October 1989, pp. 1–3.

¹⁸ *Radio Free Europe Research*, 14:48, November, 1989, p. 12.

¹⁹ *Radio Free Europe Research*, 14:45, November, 1989, p. 26.

thirty years. The worker-deputies' quota in the local soviets declined from the 1985 peak of 44.5 percent to 42 percent. By contrast, the deputies drawn from the "intelligentsia" increased from 30 to 34 percent.²⁰

The affirmation of the intelligentsia became evident in the general elections of 1989, when multicandidate competition was extended to the majority of the territorial constituencies. As a newly elected deputy from Leningrad said, "perestroika has made possible for a rank-and-file professor-jurist to vie on equal terms with a fitter-ship repairer" in elections. As a result, wrote the sociologists Nazimova and Sheinis, a radically new body was formed, "the most intellectual [*intelligentnoe*] legislature in Soviet history."²¹ Worker-candidates and communist party officials were losing ground *together*, with intellectuals and professionals emerging as the sole clear winner. While workers constituted 35 percent of the deputies in the 1984 Supreme Soviet, they made up only 23.7 percent of the candidates in 1989, and about 18 percent of the deputies who were finally elected. A number of CPSU leading cadres, local officials, and mayors experienced bitter defeats in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, Frunze, Kishinev, Odessa, and other cities. All in all, 49 percent of secretaries (not just first secretaries) of republic and regional Party committees who competed in multicandidate constituencies were not elected. By contrast, the stratum of deputies belonging to the "intelligentsia" increased from less than 14 percent in 1984 to about 40 percent.²²

Although the vast majority of the intelligentsia members who won in 1989 belonged to the Communist Party, many of them, like the economist Gavriil Popov, the historian Yuri Afanasiev, and the lawyer Anatolii Sobchak, made headlines at the sessions of the newly elected Congress of People's Deputies by organizing as a nascent parliamentary opposition, the Interregional Deputies' Group. By the eve of the local and republican elections of spring 1990, these deputies had formed an electoral coalition with a group of CPSU intellectuals and reform-minded officials and started organizing as a "party within the Party." This so-called Democratic Platform had its cradle in the High Party School of Moscow whose director, Vecheslav Shostakovskii, has recently revealed that only 5 percent of the organization's supporters are blue-collar workers.²³

Although complete results of 1990 elections are not yet in, the information available indicates that Democratic Platform and connected local umbrella organizations scored major victories over CPSU *apparatchiki*, especially in the RSFSR and urban centers. They won at least one-third of the Russian parliament's seats and the overwhelming majority in the municipal soviets of cities such as Leningrad, Kiev, Sverdlovsk, and most noticeably Moscow, where the opposition succeeded in

electing mayor one of their national leaders, the economist G. Popov. Anecdotal evidence also confirms the trend toward a dramatic reduction of workers among the deputies. Of the deputies elected in the first round of parliamentary elections in the small republics of Moldavia and Kirghizia, more than 80 percent are reported to be white-collar employees and professionals. From among the candidates running for the parliament of the RSFSR, the most populated Soviet republic, over 70 percent were "representatives of the intelligentsia," while only 8.7 percent were blue-collar industrial workers.²⁴

Conservatives, Populists & Westernizers

While the introduction of multicandidate elections was proposed by Gorbachev in 1987, communist one-party rule was not at issue in the Soviet Union. Public discussion revolved around the issue of the social composition of future representative bodies. Many feared, and rightly, that reform's most obvious 'casualty' would be the system of social quotas used by the Party to ensure a relative majority of workers among national and local deputies. For the next two years or so, the theme of the 'leading role of the working class' overshadowed the 'leading role of the communist party.' Their connection emerged only when actual electoral confrontation produced its second casualty: the party *apparatchiki*.

Conservatives gradually became alarmed as the 1987 contested election experiment was being prepared. Some warned against "creating an artificial social conflict" between worker and peasant candidates and the intelligentsia. Determining the "proper social composition of the soviets" is a delicate matter involving the "primary function of the CPSU in the guidance of the soviets," they argued: "The whole historical experience demonstrates that the leading role of the working class in the soviets cannot be obtained automatically, but requires the control of the Marxist-Leninist Party."²⁵ As the reform process and the political struggle continued, Nina Andreeva's famous manifesto of the 'conservative wing' appeared, with its warning that for the first time in Soviet history, an alliance had been formed between the top Party leadership and the "reformist intelligentsia." Accordingly, the political question was: "which social class is the leading class of *perestroika*?"²⁶

Gorbachev himself had to intervene on the subject at the XIX Party Conference in June 1988, although he then circumvented the main question by saying that once the deputy corps are formed according to "the free and vibrant will of the electorate," there is no reason "to worry about a disproportionate representation of different classes and social strata." A year

20 See *Sostav deputatov mestnykh Sovetov 1987 g.* (Moscow: Izvestiya, 1987); Aleksandr Kovler, "Sovetskaya izbiratel'naya sistema na putyakh eksperimenta", Moscow, 1987 (mimeo); Stephen White, "Reforming the Electoral System", *The Journal of Communist Studies*, 4:4, December 1988, and Jeffrey Hahn, "An Experiment in Competition: The 1987 Elections to the Local Soviets", *Slavic Review*, 47:3, Fall 1988.

21 See the interview with deputy Anatolii Sobchak, "Champion of the People", *Moscow News*, no. 37, 17-24 September, 1989, p. 16; and Alla Nazimova and Viktor Sheinis in *Izvestiya*, 6 May 1989.

22 See *Izvestiya*, 6 May 1989; *Pravda*, 7 May 1989; and *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 21, 27 May-2 June 1989, p. 8.

23 *L'Unita*, 12 April 1990.

24 *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 2 March 1990.

25 These 'conservative' arguments were dispassionately reported in Georgii V. Barabashev, "Izбирatel'naya kampaniya: tsely i sredstva", *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, no. 4, 1987.

26 *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 13 March 1989.

later, sticking to this line, he did not comment on the worker-candidates' defeat in the general elections. Rather, he concentrated on the defeat of numerous *apparatchiki*, and even here without dramatizing the issue: the loser was not "the Party" but individual officials who had not yet changed their "old attitudes and behavior."²⁷ This, however, could hardly reassure those who saw where the new electoral trends were leading.

"A harsh political struggle is under way," wrote the conservative paper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* soon after the 1989 elections, in which "an important component of society [the workers] is being essentially expelled (though by 'democratic' means) from the structure of supreme power." And a newly elected deputy, a miner, declared before the Congress: "On our flag is written the slogan: *All power to the soviets of workers and peasants!* Have we really repudiated this slogan and the conquests of the October? The interests of the miners, the interests of the workers, will not be championed by professors, but by workers themselves."²⁸

The political essence of the matter became clear at the extraordinary Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee held in April to discuss the post-election situation. A regional Party committee secretary said that the intelligentsia was "tearing away the working class from the political arena"; the Party should not tolerate such a situation, which could have "unpredictable consequences." The mayor of Moscow, Valentin Saikin (who lost in the elections) lamented that demagogues were using the slogan "power to the people" to "expel the party from the political scene." Accepting the workers' defeat, another official stated, would be a "capitulation" before bourgeois ideology. Another complained that the defeat of the party apparatus was permitting consideration of a multiparty system, tantamount to advocating "the convergence between socialism and capitalism."

Two types of hard-line response emerged at the plenum. 'Plain conservatives' advocated a state law establishing fixed quotas for workers and peasants in the soviets. Azerbaidzhan Party leader Abdul-Rakhman Vezirov added a flavour of authoritarianism by suggesting that the Party and the workers unite to defeat the opposition by any means: in his republic, Party activists and blue-collar workers had cooperated during the election campaign by setting up "voluntary patrols" [*druzhini*] to "normalize the situation" and isolate "extremist groups." In this way a high number of workers and all key Party officials had been elected. A seemingly more moderate but politically more substantial response was advocated by Yuri Solovev, an election loser who would shortly thereafter be removed as Leningrad regional party chief and Politburo member. He proposed that the workers who had been elected be allowed to organize a separate group (a "Worker-Deputies Congress"), to "defend the role of the working class in the forms that are possible in the country's present situation."²⁹

This call for workers' political self-organization, which was soon imbued with populist emphasis, seems to have prevailed among the hardliners. A few weeks after the plenum, a United Working Peoples' Front was set up in Leningrad, with Nina Andreeva and Solovev addressing its foundation meeting. Front cochairman Veniamin Yarin, a deputy and a worker in a metallurgical combine, addressed the crucial question in an interview in the trade union daily, *Trud*: "It is time to make the slogan *All power to the Soviets!* more precise. What kind of Soviets? Soviets without workers and peasants? Soviets without Communists?"³⁰

A major point in the Front's program is a reform of the election system whereby at least one-half of the deputies would be elected in constituencies based on workplace rather than place of residence. Although such elections would still be contested and no social quotas would be pre-imposed, the party machine, trade unions and the Front itself would find it easier to control them and thus ensure victory for a greater number of "working people" (and officials). In arguing their case, the Front supporters put forward a suggestive "Street-vs.-Factory" metaphor. The Street, they say, is a haphazard social mélange "incapable of expressing the fundamental interests of the working people" and easily manipulated by bourgeois ideologues who advocate elitist and professional parliamentarianism "without workers and peasants." The Factory "has no time to attend public rallies and listen to street oratory;" it is a sociopolitical entity "unified by social goals and rightfully speaking on the people's behalf." Under the old election system, although constituencies were territorially-based, candidates were nominated mainly by work collectives under the firm control of the CPSU. This granted the Factory privileged access to the soviets. By contrast, in 1989, work collectives and the Party lost control over the nomination and election process, favoring the victory of the candidates of the Street, "a bitter defeat and a cruel lesson for the Factory."³¹

The proposals of the Working People's Front echo a model of 'corporate representation' with deep roots in the early days of Bolshevik rule, by far the most plausible and best articulated alternative that has yet emerged to both the Soviet nonelective quota system and the classic Western democratic model of political representation. Although reform along these lines has not been endorsed thus far, the top Soviet leadership appears to fear a symbiosis between the potential for revolt among the *apparatchiki* and the Front's capacity for social mobilization along populist lines, and seems prepared to make concessions. In March 1990, Gorbachev coopted the Front's cochairman, Yarin, into his newly created ten-member advisory board, the Presidential Council. A month later, Gorbachev was accompanied by Yarin to the industrial region of Sverdlovsk where he discussed the issue of production-based constituencies with the workers of the giant Uralmash plant, and acknowledged

27 *Pravda*, 29 June 1988, and 27 April 1989.

28 See D. Valeev in *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 5 April 1989; and the proceedings of the Congress of People's Deputies in *Izvestiya*, 28 May 1989.

29 All speeches at the April Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee were published in *Pravda*, 27 April 1989.

30 *Trud*, 15 October 1989.

31 *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 6 October 1989. See also the Front's Program in *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya*, 11 July 1989.

that "too few representatives of the working class" had been elected to the soviets.³²

The vehemence of the reactions to the 1989 election results made Soviet intellectuals aware of the political explosiveness of questioning the 'leading role' of the working class, let alone the Communist Party. Their initial response was cast very much in the original Gorbachev mold: the voters had punished not 'the Workers,' 'the Party,' or even the Party apparatus, but individual officials who were now trying to present *perestroika* as a confrontation between the intelligentsia and the working class. They suggested that the traditional 'class approach' underlining the old, nonelective quota system might be outdated. Some deputies told the Congress of People's Deputies that they had always defended the interests of the workers, despite being intellectuals.³³ Others warned that the arguments of those who presented themselves as "anti-*petit-bourgeoisie* fighters" and "defenders of the people" should be discussed "without any elitist arrogance" on the part of the intelligentsia. The main task was to ensure that the move away from the previous "elections without choice" be made irreversible; class confrontation (and unwise attacks against the Party) had to be avoided. Without ever mentioning the multiparty issue, they argued that competitive elections and majority rule would strengthen the legitimacy and stability of the Soviet political system and the authority of the Communist Party. They also tried to reassure workers that free elections would eventually "advance on the proscenium" worker-leaders who genuinely represented working class interests. Meanwhile, the intelligentsia would act "as always, as the most erudite, prepared and disinterested defender of the working class and the peasantry." It would certainly make a better ally for the workers than those *apparatchiki* who, whatever their social origin, were trying to "instill an anti-intelligentsia mood" among the people in order to defend their own interests and privileges.³⁴

As the debate became radicalized, however, the need to rebut the theses of the United Working People's Front with more vigor became urgent. A group of prominent academics wrote in the central daily *Izvestiya* that holding elections in production-based constituencies would perpetuate the corporate particularism already embodied "in the structures of the present day," where the people are not *citizens* of a "civil society," but *producers* whose entire life "depends on where and for whom they work." The authors accepted the Front's "Street-vs.-Factory" metaphor only to point out that the task of democratization ought to be precisely that of moving the center of political life away from the workplace "to the micro-borough, borough, city, district and village." Finally, citing the classic principles of parliamentary democracy and political

representation, they concluded that the social affiliation of elected political elites is of no importance, for "a Deputy represents not a class- or occupation-based interest group but the nation as a whole."³⁵

But not all radical intellectuals proved able to avoid "elitist arrogance." Some fired openly and directly at the principle of the leading role of the working class, which was likened to a sort of "ascribed feudal privilege." For instance, deputy Gennadii Lisichkin, an economist, wrote that an end should be put "to this hotchpotch which sings the praises of manual (more often than not unskilled) labor, and serves to split society into responsible toilers and sponging intellectuals, and which consequently flirts with the former and scorns the latter." According to Lisichkin, the 'leading role' should belong to nonmanual labor, i.e., to those social strata which, in the Soviet Union "as in all economically developed countries," make the greatest contribution to the growth of national incomes.³⁶ With similar positions reaching the pages of the leading periodicals of the Soviet reformist intelligentsia, the phase of caution was coming to an end. Not surprisingly, in some instances public confrontation even acquired a 'class struggle' flavor. This seemed to be the case in Leningrad, where a Popular Front set up by the City's radical intelligentsia accused the United Working People's Front of instilling "the logic of the Civil War days into modern social life by limiting the suffrage of the petty-bourgeois strata of the population."³⁷

By the end of 1989, as the radical-reformist intelligentsia was being definitively pushed along the 'revolutionary' path, the issues of the leading role of the working class and the leading role of the communist party began to run in parallel. The election campaign of 1989-1990 was carried out amidst a mounting wave of strikes and street demonstrations against local communist leaders. As communist regimes collapsed in East Europe, the political crisis accelerated in the Soviet Union as well. The October session of the Congress of Peoples' Deputies could still reject the radicals' proposal to abolish the constitutional guarantee of the Party's leading role, which Gorbachev treated as "rubbish." Three months later, in February 1990, such a proposal was presented by Gorbachev himself at a plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, and was approved. Then, as mentioned above, the defeat of Party *apparatchiki* and working-class candidates continued in the spring elections, and the Democratic Platform coalition of radical intellectuals and reform-minded Party officials began to explore the possibility of founding a nationwide independent political party.

Today, on the eve of the XXVIII congress of the CPSU, the Soviet Union seems to be following other East European

32 *Soviet Television*, 25 April 1990, as reported in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, Daily Report, Soviet Union, 26 April 1990, p. 105. For a limited electoral experiment with factory-based constituencies which was carried out in February 1990, see Dawn Mann, "The RSFSR Elections: Factory-Based Constituencies", *Radio Liberty—Report on the USSR*, 2:14, April 1990.

33 See *Izvestiya*, 28 May 1989.

34 See Alla Nazimova and Viktor Sheinis in *Izvestiya*, 6 May 1989; and Vitalii Gol'danskii, "Opyat 'klassovyi podkhod' . . .", *Novoe vremya*, 26 May 1989, p. 9.

35 O. Shkaratan, P. Kudyukin and Yu. Permyakov in *Izvestiya*, 25 October 1989.

36 See Gennadii Lisichkin, "Social Packing Again?" and "Ploughman with a Fiddle", in *Moscow News*, no. 22, 4-11 June 1989, p. 10, and *idem*, no. 28, 16-23 July 1989, p. 3.

37 See the platform of the Leningrad Popular Front, as reported in Aleksander Levikov, "Are Leningraders Any Worse?", *Moscow News*, no. 32, 13-20 August 1989, p. 10.

countries toward the second phase of the transition process, one of open multiparty contest. However, for the Soviet situation to be fully comparable with that in East Europe, two conditions must still be met. The Communist ruling elites must be extensively *replaced*, not just challenged, by people of different social background and political and ideological outlook; and a system of democratic political representation must be *definitively* established. It is still not clear whether the intelligentsia revolution will reach this point in the Soviet Union.

Prospects

Will East European intellectuals maintain their present leadership positions once the political arena is dominated by new political parties? If not, how are we to assess the long-term impact of the intelligentsia revolution in those countries where it seems to have won? And, finally, how likely is the Soviet Union, where the reform process was initiated, to follow East Europe in the revolutionary process of communism's fall?

Adam Michnik, a social scientist, deputy to the Polish parliament, and an adviser to Premier Mazowiecki, suggests a negative answer to the first question. "For idealist politicians like ourselves," he says in an interview referring to the Polish intelligentsia, "this is perhaps the last season; then we shall go back to our studies. New men will come, and new divisions among parties, social groups and ideas."³⁸ In the near future thus power will shift to people who have or acquire the specific skills and resources needed to lead, administer, and represent. This already appears to be happening in East Germany, where the consolidation of party machines is more advanced. There, the intellectuals who played a crucial role in mobilizing the population against the communist regime in fall 1989 are now realizing bitterly that their place "will always be in opposition" to the emergent professional politicians.³⁹

But if the future leaders will not be today's "intellectuals," neither are they likely to be yesterday's "proletarians." The

social composition of post-communist legislatures and political parties will be more similar to that of their counterparts in the West. The outcome of the intelligentsia revolution will not be the Platonic ideal of a city-state run by an elite of "philosophers" but, to paraphrase Bialer's statement quoted above, a "propitious environment" supporting the aspiration of middle- and upper-class individuals to enter the elites and sub-elites and "propitious conditions" for their competition with individuals of lower-class origin. The communist experience will then be recalled as the first and sole period in modern history when the *political class* was massively and systematically recruited from the ranks of the *working class*. This is a plausible prognosis for those East Central European countries where a Western-style system of political representation is already being established. (Poland, with its entrenched Catholic populism could be the exception.)

As for the third question, in the Soviet Union, too, the forces pushing westward are substantial, and reversing their ascendent trend will not be easy. The struggle is still on, however, as the "political-vs.-corporate representation" debate demonstrates. The revolution of the Soviet intelligentsia can still be superseded by a populist reaction. This would halt the process of the elites' sociopolitical reshuffling and the resultant deep transformations of the political system. Whether in this case the Soviet Union could still be labelled a 'communist' regime might be debatable; neither would it be easy to label it a Western-style democracy.

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38 See the interview with A. Michnik in *Repubblica*, 7 February 1990.

39 See the interview with the leader of New Forum S. Pflugbeil in *The New York Times*, 28 February 1990.